

The Ballarat Naturalist

April 2010



MEMBERS NIGHT—SLIME MOULDS LES HANRAHAN

After some rain in February I hoped to see some fungi. Some small puffballs and a couple of field mushrooms were all I could find. But I noticed some white spots near some dry grass and gravel in my yard. On closer inspection I saw about a dozen patches of a white slime mould. Each patch was up to 50mm. across and when touched some of the slime mould stuck to my finger. As I usually do when I see something unusual I took some photos. Now white slime mould is not all that photogenic. Some yellow slime mould that I saw a month later is slightly more so, but not much. What is interesting is their place among organisms that live. After some research on the internet I discovered the following information.



Yellow slime mould *Fuligo septica*

Sometimes after soaking summer rains, you can find a yellow, white or pink frothy slime on a log or stump or a plant. This is a slime mould moving to a site where it can produce its fruit bodies. For most of their lives, slime moulds are hidden inside well-rotted logs or stumps, or buried in leaf mould. When it is time to fruit, however, slime moulds migrate to

a better site for spore dispersal. The slimy mass can travel several feet and climbs any object living or dead that gives it a site advantage for spore dispersal. So it is not unusual to find slime moulds fruiting on green plants, dead twigs, stumps, logs or high up a living tree trunk. It might be unwise to fall asleep on the lawn during the slime mould season.

Slime moulds don't fit easily into our classification system. They move and feed like animals. They engulf all kinds of organic particles in their path like giant amoebae. They digest what they can and, animal-like, they eject unwanted particles. Slime moulds are fungus-like, however, in producing tiny fruit bodies containing spores that are dispersed by the wind.

In many fundamental aspects of their structure and biology Slime Moulds are not remotely related to the true fungi. The fungus protoplasm is protected by a hard wall of chitin or similar material; slime moulds by mucus. The spore in slime moulds has a cellulose wall. Cellulose is not found in fungi. The slime mould can germinate to produce an amoeba that can grow, divide and multiply like protozoan amoeba. Slime moulds feed amoeba-like by engulfing organic matter and then disposing harmful unwanted material. Fungi feed by secretion of enzymes. These enzymes break down the substrate into simpler water soluble compounds that are then absorbed. Fungi hyphae grow but don't move.



White slime mould *Fuligo* sp.

The white slime mould mentioned earlier was still there until heavy rain a month later. It was now dry, greyish white and powdery when rubbed. The spores were a purplish black colour. I think that this white mould belongs to the *Fuligo* genus. I saw a bright yellow slime mould on a stump in the Wombat forest. A neighbour said they saw a similar one on grass in a horse paddock. This one has the scientific name *Fuligo septica*, but it has even worse common names.

MORE FROM MEMBERS NIGHT...

Claire and Peter Dalman projected slides to show that reservoirs have been low before and ones of other interest. Slides from 1968 showed an empty Melton Weir and very low Pikes Creek reservoir. These were followed by slides showing a full Lake Wendouree and flooded Marie Crescent. There was also a slide of members at a Western Victoria camp and of the old begonia house. Other material brought along by Claire and Peter included a newspaper reporting the cessation of World War 2 and some natural history collection cards from childhood. They also brought along a collection of seed pods that had been made by Helen Burgess over many years.

Greg Binns showed and spoke to publications from his library by leading naturalists at the turn of the 20th Century.

1. *A Dichotomous Key to the Birds of Australia* by A.G. Campbell, a supplement to *The Emu*, 1905. This can be used to identify birds in hand by selecting from two contrasting characteristics and then eliminating that which does not apply to the specimen, and by passing on to the next two characters (indicated by a number) the name of the bird is eventually reached.
2. *Nests and Eggs of the Honeyeaters or Meliphagous Birds of Australia* by A. J. Campbell. This was first read before the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science in Sydney in 1898.
3. *Useful Birds of Southern Australia with notes on other Birds* by Robert Hall, 1907. Greg read extracts relating to some interesting common names of birds that are no longer used and from an entry espousing virtues of the Indian Myna introduced to Australia in number between 1863 and 1872. Hall's comments generated some disquiet from members present.
4. *An Explorer and His Birds – John Gilberts Discoveries in 1844-45* by Alec H. Chisholm. 1945. Gilbert was brought to Australia by John Gould the Birdman in 1838 and carried out extensive field recording and collecting in 1838-41 and again in 1842-45. He was killed by Aborigines in North Queensland in 1845 whilst with the Leichhardt Expedition to Arnham Land.

Zelda Martin...

Usually I don't submit slides at Members' Nights, as I am a computer nerd not a field naturalist, and my main interest in photography is to make a record, however, the topic *Treasures from the Archives* attracted my attention. My first memorable holiday was a trip to Innaminka, in September, 1967. With three friends from Ballarat, I left for Broken Hill where our bus/camping tour started and ended. There was not much that our driver, Colin, did not know about the countryside, and the flora and fauna, and we didn't keep to roads – such as they were. He mostly just used the compass above the windscreen to find our way to Cooper Creek and the Dig tree, to Innaminka, to Birdsville and to many places in between.

We were also to discover that Elizabeth Burchill, author and former Australian Inland Mission nurse was making a return to Innaminka, where she had nursed so many years ago. To this day, I can hear her contacting stations via the galah session on the radio. Her presence on the trip was something special as we visited five stations where she knew the owners, and of course our small bus tagged along – usually for morning or afternoon tea.

My choice of photos was made easier by the Channel Country being a carpet of flowers due to a very wet year (similar to the present). We did have a short delay at the Birdsville pub as the track was closed; in fact it was still very boggy when we left. I also included photos of our group exploring the 'wildlife under the salt crust' of Lake Eyre which we explored via Mini Mokes.

SEANA

A most successful SEANA camp was held on the weekend of 19—22 March. Based at Pax Hill, participants registered on Friday night, chatted, signed up for excursions and enjoyed an introduction to Ballarat by Greg Binns, who spoke on Lake Wendouree and its history, Les Hanranhan who spoke on Fungi around Ballarat, Carol Hall showed some delightful photos of wildflowers and John Gregurke gave an introduction to the grasslands excursion.

The following three days were filled with people going off on excursions, eating dinner at Pax Hill and enjoying the social contact and listening to most interesting speakers. All in all it was a very successful camp—as one visitor said on his way home “Good on you Ballarat—you’ve done well!” Mind you we did well because of the careful planning by our wonderful Committee.



Registration



Photos: Nina Netherway



Welcome by our President, Elspeth

SEANA EXCURSION 7- LA GERCHE WALK AND ST GEORGES LAKE SAT 20TH MARCH

The shrill piping of a White-throated Treecreeper sent us on our way on a beautiful sunny, autumn day in Ballarat to Creswick and the La Gerche walk. John La Gerche was born on the Channel Island of Jersey in 1845 and whilst he was at school there, gold was discovered on the other side of the world and bushland around Creswick was to be altered forever.

An excellent student, John brought his "high moral principles and conscientious sense of duty" to the colony of Victoria in 1865. By 1870 he was operating the Wombat Sawmill near Daylesford. The mill closed and in 1882 he was appointed bailiff for the Ballarat-Creswick State Forest. He took his job of preventing the illegal cutting of timber very seriously, but his passion was to re-stock the forest. Blue gum, Radiata Pine, Golden and Black Wattle began the process and even quinine and tea (unsuccessfully). Sawpit gully became the focus and by 1899 an area of 300 acres containing 24,600 trees had been planted and the adjacent nursery was in full production. This is now the Creswick Campus of the University of Melbourne, Department of Forest and Ecosystem Science.

Our fascinating walk took us past the marbled-bark Black and Western Yellow Pines and under the English and Cork Oaks in Sawpit Gully. The sunny slope of the gully was dominated by Radiata Pine and of particular interest was the "Mother tree" which, because it was regarded as the best specimen, provided the seed for many of the pine plantations of Victoria. Many other introduced plants and trees were to be noted such as Irish Strawberry, Gorse, Ivy, Blackberry and Holly. But in amongst it all were Cherry Ballart, Silver Wattle, Tea Tree, Blackwood. Dianella and a striking orange gilled fungi and the birds were there! Yellow cockatoos creaked overhead, a white-fronted tree creeper piped, Crimson Rosellas chimed, a Golden Whistler was seen, Grey Fantails flitted as did Blue Wrens.

A short stop for a "cuppa" at St George's Lake added a Scarlet Robin, Wood Duck, Black Duck, Coots and a Bronzewing to the list. A most historically interesting afternoon was enjoyed by all.

Chris Baulch

Membership Fees are now due!

Ordinary member (Adult)

\$35.00



Family

\$55.00

Distant Members

\$15.00

Student Member

\$15.00

Newsletter Postage

\$7.00



SEANA—BUNINYONG BOTANICAL GARDENS EXCURSION

Despite being a long term Ballarat resident, this is the first time I have visited these scenic gardens. They were first established in 1861 and were planned in two sections totalling 10 acres. Part two is mainly open space with the “Gong” swamp area now dry. At the end is an early 19th C dry stone wall. There are 4 heritage trees, all Acer species, one being L Acer Platanoides “Red Norway Maple” and another A Opalus “Italian Maple”. The great dividing trail also goes through this area.

The main gardens have many trees, a pleasing duck pond and bridge, an Avenue of Honour at the entrance and an attractive and recently restored rotunda that was first built in 1901.

At the side is a sunken walled garden area that was originally the swimming pool. The pool was built in the 1870's and was fed by nearby springs. This area has recently been neatly renovated under the Work for the Dole scheme.

Notes about the early Curator's duties were detailed - he had to look after the ponds, the baths and the animals, as well as the gardens and teach the children to swim! In another area there is a brick stove where the Curator and family boiled water and sold food to picnickers as a fundraising exercise.

After thanking our volunteer guide we headed up Mount Buninyong - Height 745m. A wedge tail eagle flew beside us for a while as we ascended giving a great view. Some of the group climbed the tower at the top, being rewarded with great views of Ballarat and distant hills. The fire at Mt Cole area could also be seen. Another surprise was seeing a Koala sleeping in the trunk of a tree in the car park area.

Val Hocking



Guide, Lorraine Powell, with participants

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB OF BALLARAT INC.
PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
ON 5TH MARCH 2010

I am pleased to present the President's report for the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Inc. for the 2009/2010 year, my sixth as president of the club.

Members of our club have again experienced varied and interesting activities and meeting speakers. General meeting attendance remains stable at an average 24. For 2009 meetings were again held at the S.M.B. Horticulture School, corner of Gillies and Gregory Streets Wendouree, on the first Friday of each month with the committee establishing a program for the year as has been the normal practice. However at the end of 2009 advice was received that the building was to be renovated during 2010 and would no longer be available for groups to use. After enquiring about alternatives the meeting room at the Prince of Wales park was considered to be the most suitable alternative considering the room arrangement, location and availability of a cupboard for storage. A working bee was organised for Thursday 10th December 2010 to transfer the resources stored at the SMB with most going to the Prince of Wales Park and some temporarily into storage. The SMB location has been a good convenient venue with cupboards made available for storage of club books and equipment. Appreciation is extended to John Gregurke and Carol Hall for their research and organisation in obtaining an alternative venue at short notice.

A diverse range of topics has been covered by speakers at the general meetings. In April Dennis Crawford, author and nature photographer spoke on Backyard Insects, the title of one of his books. At the May meeting Stafford Mc Knight, Lecturer, University of Ballarat provided an overview of the mineralogy of gold. The June meeting saw Les Hanrahan, Fran Hanrahan, Tony Johns and Carol Hall make presentations as part of a Members Night. Tony Wilson, BEN Chairman and nature photographer was the speaker at a night when the Wattles of Ballarat book was launched by Ern Perkins. In a change of approach a DVD prepared by Linda Handscombe for the Pomonal wildflower show on the Origin of Botanical Names was shown at the August meeting. For October Jenny Sedgwick gave a talk on the Leigh River as a precursor to the excursion she led the following Sunday to places that otherwise would have been inaccessible to the public. The November meeting was a workshop on the Pea Family led by John Gregurke and in December Matt Gibson from the Centre for Environmental Management, University of Ballarat spoke on Nanya, the University's South West NSW Research Station. The first topic in the new venue in February 2010 was "What Rock is That" and involved an outline of the classification of rocks by Fran Hanrahan followed by Phil Kinghorn presenting and explaining samples from his collection. As is usual the March AGM will see members providing images and items, this time under the title "Treasures from my Arc hives".

The 31st Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture was held in September and was presented by Peter Dahlhaus, Senior Lecturer and specialist in environmental geology and hydrology, University of Ballarat. He spoke on the topic Groundwater-Surface Water Interactions. With the use and availability of water being a concern that affects everyone, the topic for the Stella Bedggood lecture had broad community interest and Peter gave an informative, interesting and wide ranging talk on water generally and specifically on groundwater in Ballarat and south west Victoria. Once more we were pleased to welcome some members of Stella's family and welcomed back Ron and Yvonne Bishop from Maryborough who, except for last year, have attended every lecture. The lecture was attended by about fifty members and guests.

Excursions held on the Sunday or Saturday following the meeting started in April with a walk along the Yarrowee Trail South led by John Morrish, followed by John Gregurke leading excursions to the Clarksdale area and then to BEN reserves in May and June respectively. In July Fran Hanrahan escorted a group to "Significant Trees of Ballarat" then in August Claire and Peter Dalman organised a car convoy on a Rivers of Gold excursion using a CD produced by the Creswick Historical Society. September excursion was to Charlesford Mine area led by Carol Hall. The October excursion already mentioned was to the Leigh River. In November Elizabeth and Denis Thurgood escorted us around the area south of Beaufort with a stop at their home for lunch on the verandah and 2009 was finished with Bill Murphy leading through the Enfield Forest. February was off to the Western Treatment Plant near Werribee and March excursions are titled SEANA Camp reconnaissance.

The club's "campout" was to Apollo Bay. Star of the Sea turned out to be unavailable but fortunately we were offered the Christian Brothers retreat Heath's Folly overlooking the bay with a date change to Monday 13 to Friday 17 July. The camp was attended by 12 members who were fortunate with good weather and the sight of southern right whales in the area all week. Members also attended the SEANA camps at Port Fairy and Dunkeld.

In the first half of the year members including Carol Hall, Val Hocking, Greg Binns and John Gregurke spent some time preparing notes for a bush trail near the Cave Hill Creek camp and this involved mid month excursions in April, May and possibly other times. The Club received some recompense for member's travels with part shared between those who took cars. Another club project involved the establishment of quadrats for the monitoring of change in the bush. John Gregurke instigated this prompted by Ern Perkins talk when he was awarded the Australian Natural History medal. The quadrats were surveyed as mid month excursions with two near the Great Dividing Trail in the Creswick Forest and one at the Linton Trust for Nature block. A mid month excursion was also made to the Western Treatment Plant in December.

A major achievement for the club has been the publishing of the book "Wattles of Ballarat". A grant of \$1,000 towards the cost of publication was received last year from the Victorian Community Fund – Holsworth Local Heritage Trust and a loan of \$2801.60 for the balance cost to print 500 copies was provided by the South East Australia Naturalists Association (SEANA). The book which was initiated by the late Pat Murphy and completed by club members particularly John Gregurke, Carol Hall and Bill Murphy was launched at the July meeting by Ern Perkins, Pat Murphy's brother. Congratulations to all those who contributed and supported this project which involved many trips into the bush to update and improve photographs as well as design and text editing.

At the February 2008 general meeting our club agreed to host the SEANA 2010 autumn camp and the time has now come around for this. The camp is to be held at the Pax Hill Scout camp complex with some participants staying on site and others using accommodation in Ballarat. Planning is at the final stages.

Matters of local environmental interest continue to be of concern. Again, with very little water in Lake Wendouree despite redirection from Paul's wetland and the northern waste water treatment plant, the lake has continued as an ephemeral wetland with an associated interesting variety of birds including some species not recorded before. Lake Learmonth and Lake Burrumbeet have also remained quite dry. There have been no major formal submissions this year but club members have continued to maintain a watch for plans with potential negative environmental impact. Comments were provided to the DSE on the planned fuel reduction burning of a relatively large area near Clarksdale.

I am again appreciative of the efforts of everybody who has helped in countless ways to the smooth running of the club this year, especially all committee members. Again I thank Les Hanrahan for being treasurer, Greg Binns who is Vice President and public officer, Nina Netherway as newsletter editor and particularly John Gregurke who as secretary of our club and also secretary of SEANA has carried a considerable load this year with the organisation of the SEANA camp. Sincere appreciation to members of the committee who have not renominated. John Morrish is thanked for his contribution over the last two years on committee and I would like to particularly acknowledge Helen Burgess who has been a stalwart of the committee for over 30 years including terms as President, Vice President and Secretary and who over many years has quietly assisted the funds of the club with numerous contributions, particularly of preserves to the trading table as well as bringing the milk to each meeting for as long as I can remember. All of which has happened in a quite and unassuming way. The input of members through their field reports, comments and contributions at meetings and on excursions adds interest for the club. I look forward to our next year of activities and wish the incoming committee well.

Peter Dalman

SEANA EXCURSION TO CRESWICK MINING RELICS

Five carloads had a most enjoyable excursion following the CD, *Buried Rivers of Gold Heritage Trail Creswick*. At most sites, the CD provided quite long talks about the items of interest, many read by local historian, Jack Sewell.

At Smeaton we enjoyed a wander around the outside of the mill, a five storey bluestone construction, built in 1862. The Daylesford Clunes road has probably the best collection of mullock heaps and mining relics in the district so we had an extensive view of past mining activity. At the Hepburn Estate No. 1 mine we were able to see the remains of the Cornish Pump House, built to house the engine used to pump water from the deep leads. At the Berry Consols Extended mines we were able to view, again from a distance, the foundations of the steam engine and winding gear.

As we travelled closer to Creswick, we followed the Australasian Deep Lead until we turned off to visit the site of the New Australasian No. 2 Mine. In 1882, this mine became the site of the worst gold mining disaster in Australia, when twenty-seven men were trapped when the mine flooded. The pumps were operated continuously (at 50,000 gallons an hour) for three days until rescuers finally could enter the mine. Only five miners were found alive. This excursion was run twice during the SEANA weekend.

Report - Zelda Martin

Excursion members clamber over the cutting at the Monash Bridge.



FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB OF BALLARAT INCORPORATED
No. A0014919P ABN 13 150 403 135
MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING - 5TH MARCH 2010.

1. Opening and Apologies

As for Annual General Meeting.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

Tabled and Summarised in Ballarat Naturalist.

Confirmed Nina Netherway, seconded Peter Dalman.

3. Business Arising:

Foxes and Rabbits on Lake Wendouree: waiting for DSE to return call.

4. Correspondence

IN:

- Castlemaine Field Naturalists: Castlemaine Naturalist, February 2010.
- Field Naturalists Club of Victoria: Membership receipt; Field Nats News, March 2010; Environment Fund donations; Victorian Naturalist, February 2010.
- Bendigo Field Naturalists Club: Whirrakee, March 2010.
- Parks Victoria: Release of Management Plan for the Great Otway NP and Otway Forest Park.
- University of Ballarat: Overdue room hire statement.
- Bendigo Bank: Statement.
- Consumer Affairs Victoria: Annual incorporation statement.
- Various: Registrations for SEANA Autumn 2010 camp.
- Australia Post: PO Box renewal \$79.50.
- Victorian National Parks Association: Appeal.

OUT

- University of Ballarat: request for tax invoice for 2009 room use dates.

5. Business arising from correspondence:

- That payment of PO Box rental (\$79.50).
Moved Carol Hall; seconded Claire Dalman. Carried

6. Reports

- Treasurer's Report: Opening Balance \$6618.28; Income: \$12.00; Expenses: \$442.31, Closing Balance: \$6187.97.
Accepted Les Harahan, seconded Elisabeth Thurgood.

7. General Business

- That the SEANA loan of \$2810.60 for *Wattles of Ballarat* be repaid in full.

Moved Greg Binns; seconded Val Hocking. Carried.

- The *Ballarat Naturalist* will be emailed to members who wish to receive it. Sheet circulated to collect email addresses.
- SEANA Autumn Camp
 - FNCB members who were only volunteering to help at Pax hill, lead or facilitate excursions need NOT register. Those attending dinners or excursions need to register and pay fees.
 - list of volunteers, excursion leaders and facilitators duties available.
 - Supper for Friday night: slices and biscuits required, see *Ballarat Naturalist* for details.
 - DSE website to be checked for Prescribed Burns proposed for the camp weekend.

8. Show and Tell

- Les Hanrahan displayed a specimen of slime mould with purple spores collected after 55mm of rain. Les explained that slime moulds are usually found on well rotted logs or in leaf mould. They migrate and climb several feet to aid spore dispersal.

9. Field Reports

- Les Hanrahan: 2 Royal Spoonbills on dam at Bungaree. Satin Flycatcher at Spargo Creek.
- Denis Thurgood: Sun dog observed in cirrus cloud at Phillip Island.
- Ken Hammond: Fock of 40+ Long-billed Corella on Eustace St Reserve, Wendouree.
- Claire Dalman: Galahs and Long-billed Corellas stripping green acorns and small branches from oak trees at Miners Rest.
- Mike Sorrel: Southern Brown Tree Frog *Litoria ewingi* in Lake Wendouree garden. Some starting to change colour from buff to green. They are singing in the rain.

10. Syllabus Item:

The members night theme was "*Treasures from My Archives*". Members had interpreted this theme in a variety of ways with digital images, slides, books newspapers, and photographs.

11. Supper

CALENDAR 2010

APRIL

- Fri 9 **NOTE CHANGE OF WEEK** due to Easter.
 Amanda Ashton and Tina Bell—Dept. of Forestry & Ecosystem Science,
 University of Melbourne (Creswick) *Casterton Fire Ecology Project*
- Sun 11 *Lake Wendouree, North Gardens and Macarthur Park Wetlands—*
 Ken Hammond, Club Member
- Sun 18 *FNCV Fungi Group Foray, Mt. Macedon. Contact Virgil Hubregtse*

MAY

- Fri 7 Marilyn Hewish, Geelong Field Naturalists Club *Owls & Other Birds of*
 North America
- Sat 8 *Haddon & Hillcrest areas. Greg Binns, Club Member*

DATE for your DIARY
FNCB Camp—Heath's Folly, Apollo Bay
 June 21—25



Committee

President..... Ms Elspeth Swan
 Vice-President..... Mr Greg Binns
 Secretary..... Mr John Gregurke
 Treasurer..... Mr Les Hanrahan

Mrs Claire Dalman
 Mr Peter Dalman
 Dr Frances Hanrahan.....

Mrs Carol Hall
 Mrs Val Hocking.....
 Ms Nina Netherway (editor).....

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Email: Secretary:-John Gregurke,
 Editor: Nina Netherway,

Website: www.ballarat.yourguide.com.au Click on *Community>Local Clubs> Environment*

Meetings are held at the Prince of Wales Park Clubrooms in Prince of Wales Park, Gillies St on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm.

Excursions: Leave from the carpark adjacent to BGS & BHS boatsheds at the south end of Forest St., Wendouree.

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